



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: August 15, 2019

Agenda Item: Everson Bench CE, R4

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background: The proposed Everson Bench Conservation Easement (CE) consists of 440 deeded acres of sagebrush-grassland and badlands of the Arrow Creek and Coffee Creek breaks. The ranch also includes 1,500 acres of leased federal lands. The property serves as a gateway to largely inaccessible breaks, which comprise a portion of the Upper Missouri Breaks National Monument (UMRBNM) and provide excellent mule deer and upland game bird habitat. Elk have also been expanding into this area as their populations increase. The Moline Ranch CE, approximately 6 miles north, provides access to a portion of the UMRBNM, but a large swath (~9,100 acres) remains inaccessible to public access. Acquisition of a CE on this property would provide perpetual public access to these lands.

The landowner has traditionally allowed public hunting on his property and wishes for that to continue. This year, he enrolled his entire property (~2,500 acres) in the Block Management Program (the entire property comprises a majority of cropland; the proposed CE area is confined to native sagebrush-grasslands within his deeded acres).

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has been heavily involved in developing this CE proposal and has expressed an interest in helping fund the proposed project.

Public Involvement Process & Results: Formal public involvement has not been solicited by FWP to date. Upon endorsement by the commission, FWP would conduct appropriate due diligence, analysis, and public review processes.

Alternatives and Analysis: Proposal alternatives and analysis would be developed by FWP (upon endorsement by the commission) and released in a draft EA for public review/comment opportunity.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends endorsement of this proposal, allowing the department to further pursue and evaluate it and to offer opportunities for public review and comment.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission endorse the proposal to negotiate the Everson Bench Conservation Easement and complete associated analysis.